

Renee, Book #2 (Part 1

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Summary: Is the struggle over? Or is it just beginning?

Renee, Book #2 (Part 1

~*~ Chapter One ~*~

"Okay. I'm afraid I don't understand this," Rachel growled, shooting me a slightly outraged look. "Obviously I don't understand this. See, I thought I heard you say that you held the life of a --" (she let go a few words that I can't repeat) "-- traitor in your hand, and this...traitor...is still alive?"

I raised my eyes to her face. She fell silent suddenly at the tortured look in my eyes. "I know what you would have done, Rachel," I said very quietly. "But I'm not you. I'm not any of you. And I still hold onto the innocence that I have not yet lost. I still hold onto the fact that I'm not a murderer."

I almost added, _I'm not a murderer as you are. I never adopted another's methods of revenge. I never said, "Oh, he's a murderer" when I would have done the same thing in an instant. I never blamed someone, then turned around and did the same thing. And you did._

I didn't say that.

"Innocents have no place in this war," Jake said coldly. "If you're going to do what has to be done, you're one of us. If not..."

"How do you think you're going to take the battles?" Marco spat. "How do you think you're going to take it when it's the life of a Yeerk or yours?"

~There are other ways of dealing with enemies than killing them. For instance, a quick blow to the side of the head is often an excellent alternative,~ Aximili said, speaking up in my defense.

It was because of him that I was still alive. If he had not followed

me...

"Not with an enemy who will keep coming back, who will seek you out, who will find you and murder you in your sleep!" Marco raged.

_Murder in your sleep? Isn't that what you're saying I should have done? Hypocrite, _I told him silently.

And you, Ax," Jake said in a furious tone. "You should have killed him. What were you thinking?! She has an excuse; she's a new Animorph. What about you?! Where do you get off releasing an enemy who could kill us all?! Where do you get yourself permission to...to...release that monster?!"

He did not answer. There was nothing for him to say.

I brushed my hair out of my face and listened to the _jingle jingle jingle _of my bracelet. I opened the locket and glanced at my mother's face.

She would have been proud of me. She would have understood. I took comfort in that fact.

I never even knew my mother, and yet I put so much value on what her opinions would be. Who knew? Maybe she would have agreed with Jake. Maybe she would have sided with Rachel.

Or maybe she would have done the same as I.

Maybe she would have understood what I felt. Maybe not.

"I agree with Renee," Cassie said finally.

"I would have expected it of you," Marco growled. "You're the one who quit on us."

Cassie's face contorted in shock and pain. I expected Jake to say something defending her, or maybe for Rachel to bite back at Marco, but no one said anything.

"Marco, the actions you intend to reproach are mine, and not hers," I said after a small silence. "If you are angry at me -- and I can discern that you are -- do not take it out on an innocent."

"You're really into innocence, aren't you?!" he snapped. "Do you believe that David was innocent? Do you think everyone on the face of the planet is innocent?!"

"No."

He raged on, ignoring me. "Do you just trust everyone you see?!"

I sent him an almost amused, scornful look. His mouth snapped shut, intimidated by the glance. "It's surprising that you would say that, Marco," I commented. "Normally, I trust no one. I first joined this group and I didn't trust any of you. I thought I could now -- maybe I'm wrong, or maybe your emotions are just running away with you. That's not uncommon in humans who possess little self-control, is it?"

His mouth stayed shut.

"I trusted David because his story was much like mine. Both of us with families ruined. Both of us with parents gone. He had a chance at getting his back, and I never will. The similarity of the situations -- one perhaps temporary, and one permanent -- was too blinding to allow me to see what he was. And Marco, I told you that if you were proven right I would admit it. So before we become enemies forever, I'll say this: You were right. You saw what I, in my naive state, could not see. And having trusted once -- having once abandoned myself to the naivete I have spoken of -- I promise that such a thing will not happen again. You were right and I, having been determined not to trust anyone ever again and having fallen from that goal through you, the Animorphs, and through David, see my error."

Everyone remained silent, shocked. Jake was the first to recover.

"Trust has no place in this war."

Cassie raised an eyebrow, reproaching. I shook my head. "Trust has a place everywhere, Jake. You trust each other, do you not? I do not abandon it completely; I still believe that I can trust the members of this group. Tell me now if I am wrong. If I am, I renounce my place in this war and you can leave it empty or find another to fill it."

There was a silence. I smiled faintly.

There was still a place left for trust.

But the error I had committed in trusting David would haunt me for a long, long time.

The fact that the Animorphs seemed to have forgiven me did not change the fact that David was back. True, it wasn't my fault that he was back, but it was partially my fault that he was alive. Of course, they blamed Aximili more -- I found out later that Jake took him aside and "reamed him out" (as another human would put it) for listening to such an "inexperienced, idiotic Animorph."

Forgiven me. Right.

"He's still out there," Rachel said bluntly. "No matter what, we need to dispose of him. And I'm thinking something a little more permanent this time."

"What about his parents?" Cassie asked, putting out the question that was in my mind as well.

"They can deal with it," Marco said harshly. "It isn't our fault that their son's a slimeball. It isn't our fault that they're Controllers."

"Really?" I said with an arched eyebrow. "You, the son of the ex-Visser One, can say that?"

An expression of menace and rage crossed his face. I responded to it

by a calm, unamused, unaffected look.

The deal still echoed in my mind. He would stay away from the Animorphs and the blue box, and I would help him free his parents. But he had broken his word and I was no longer bound to it.

"We have to kill him," Jake said flatly.

"I agree," Rachel nodded.

I said nothing. I wanted to agree. My life was in as much danger as theirs. They had seen what he was capable of -- and now, so had I.

I didn't want to see it. I wanted to believe that I was right, that he was innocent. But he had tried to kill me and his guilt was clear. Still, I could not reconcile myself to killing. I could not say that I would help. I could not say that I would aid in the death of another.

I could see pain on Marco's face. He was still hurt by what I, in a moment of thoughtlessness, had said. A silent cry seemed to burst from his entire being.

My mother is gone too, Marco, I wanted to say. This is what I feel like all the time. You...you and David still have a chance; your parent(s) are only Controllers. Mine are dead.

There was a silent strength in me, I suppose. Even though I had mourned my parents all my life, I'd never cried. I'd never cried in pain or anger or despair. Tears have never stained my face, and when they do I know I'll fall because I won't be able to stand it anymore.

Agony is often all the more powerful from being silent, however. My tears that had never fallen had strengthened. One burst of weakness would destroy my life and leave me a hollowed-out shell; if I let weakness dominate me even once I would have failed.

These are the reasons that I can never cry.

~I agree with Jake, Rachel, and Marco,~ Tobias said finally. ~If we don't kill him, we will be killed.~

_It's not just kill-or-be-killed for humans, _I thought. Maybe he could still be changed. Maybe he could still see that.

I knew that I was wrong. Even when I had tried so hard to help him, he had still made an attempt on my life. There was nothing more that I or anyone could do.

~You are right,~ Aximili agreed. ~Our life or his.~

Cassie sighed in frustration and smiled a sad smile. "Wasn't this how it went last time?" she said sadly. "My vote is still the same. No matter what it takes, we have to survive. We have to survive so our race can survive. And he...well, he has to die."

I alone had not voted. I could feel their eyes on me.

I remained silent, unable to resign myself to becoming a killer.

But either way, the deed would be done. He would kill us, or we would kill him. There was no way out of the situations.

Where were the lines between us?

Were there any?

~*~ Chapter Two ~*~

I opened the door of my house and stepped inside. "I'm home," I called.

"That's good," my foster mother called back. I could hear the noise of a TV and a laughtrack. Some stupid television show. I ran up the stairs of my house and fell onto my bed.

I didn't even realize I was asleep until the dreams came.

~*~

_ "You promised me!" David screamed. "You promised me you'd help me free them!" _

_ "You tried to kill me," I retorted. "The deal is gone. There can be no deal between us if your side of it has been broken." _

_ "Please!" _

_ I was startled to hear a female voice. I saw no one. _

_ "David, come back to us!" _

_ "Mom!" he cried. His voice shocked me. The tone was so like mine had been in the nightmare I'd had before... _

_ It had to be wrong! This nightmare...this dream...it was a lie! His goal was not to free his parents, his goal was to kill us! _

_ I could see him running down a dark tunnel, his face twisted into alternate expressions of despair and hate. _

_ "You doomed them to this!" he screamed at the Animorphs. _

_ Suddenly there they were. The whole group of them, wearing smug expressions on their faces. "You betrayed us," Jake said. _

_ "All I want is my parents!" he burst out in a tone of heart-rending agony. _

_ "That's a lie," I murmured softly. "It has to be." _

_ "HOW WOULD YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT?" he exploded. "YOUR PARENTS ARE DEAD!" _

_ My mind felt like it would snap for the sole reason that he was right. _

_ "There they are!" the female voice...David's mother...said again.
"There are the people who doomed us to this! Kill them, David, kill them!" _

_ "Renee," a soft voice murmured. _

_ Mom! _

_ "Help David. Help him. He is the one in the right." _

_ "Mom, I can't do that!" _

_ "Will you fail me?" _

"NO!" I screeched as I woke up. I opened my eyes and panted for air. I could see the bright sunlight streaming through my window. I hadn't been asleep long.

"Mom?" I asked the air. There was no answer.

I don't believe that dead people communicate through dreams. I don't believe in Ouiji boards. I don't believe that the dream was reality. But the terror I felt at failing my mother remained real.

I missed her. I've never had a particular bond with my adoptive family, even though they're nice people. They aren't really my parents. I know that in some homes, foster parents become "real" parents, but that's not what it's like for me. My mother remains my mother. My foster mother remains as "Auntie," as I used to call her.

I've never called her "Mom."

I cast the dream away from me. It wasn't real. And to the logical brain inside me, that meant that it didn't matter.

I rely on that brain. It has a full-time job controlling my emotions. As calm as I am, you'd never know what goes on within my heart unless you knew how hard my mind had to work to keep me beneath the calm mask that I so often wear.

Perfectionists are often that way. I feel a need to control my emotions, my grades, every controllable aspect of my life.

I had no idea what that was opening me up to.

I had no idea how I'd endanger Planet Earth.

End
file.